

Bahrain's Embassy in the U.S. Responds to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing on the Situation in Bahrain

WASHINGTON D.C. (April 25, 2011)- The Kingdom of Bahrain's Embassy in the U.S. recognizes the concerns of the Tom Lantos Human Rights commission but disagrees with the grievances aired in the commission's hearing on April 25.

Bahrain is a progressive Arab nation and a longtime ally of the United States. Historically, Bahrain has been at the forefront of ensuring civil liberties and democratic reforms in the Middle East. Bahrain respects and protects all religions and ethnic groups.

The political unrest exhibited in Bahrain was characterized by violent sectarianism. Bahrain's situation is unique from our neighbors in the greater region like Syria, Libya, and Egypt and it is wrong for the commission to treat the situation in Bahrain as indistinguishable. Actions in response to the protests went to stabilize the duress in our country and preserve our multicultural, multi-ethnic society.

The protesters did not use peaceful tactics and during the height of unrest, protesters overran our main thoroughfare and threatened our infrastructure. Bahrain was under siege and any sense of normal life was brought to a halt. Schools, businesses and ministries could not operate. The financial harbor was temporarily shut down due to road blocks and the main hospital was transformed into an opposition political command center.

Bahrain's protests had turned violent and the government was forced to respond. In order to bolster security at our critical infrastructure and to maintain national stability, Bahrain called on our regional neighbors. The nation exercised its sovereign right to invite in the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) Peninsula Shield Force to aid in our peacekeeping efforts.

This was not an act of external force or a foreign invasion. This was a necessary step to ensure Bahrain return to a state of normalcy. Since then, Bahrain's hospitals, schools, banks and shopping centers have opened for the public and we continue to make strides to resume normal life.

The Commission also made note that the Bahraini government has targeted and removed religious buildings and shrines in this time of duress. The government has not targeted specific sites. These buildings are makeshift, illegal constructions and the government has continually made sure that places of worship adhere to national regulations.

Bahrain's unflinching commitment to human rights was demonstrated by Bahrain's Crown Prince's proposed national dialogue. This effort went to make progress on meaningful democratic reforms for all Bahraini people. The national dialogue had no ceiling to the change and reforms it could have yielded. That offer went unanswered for well over one month while violent protests continued. Opposition groups refused to engage in talks and demanded that the government meet preconditions before a national dialogue began.

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The Embassy appreciates the concern of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. Bahrain is committed to a long lasting national unity between all Bahraini people and we will continue our work to find peace and to ensure human rights are enjoyed by all Bahrainis. The government of Bahrain regrets the loss of any life, regardless of religious sect or ethnicity, and we know we have a long road ahead of us. The government will work with all Bahrainis to strike a balance in peace and to achieve enduring equality.

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This has been distributed by Qorvis Communications on behalf of the Kingdom of Bahrain. More information is available at the United States Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

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